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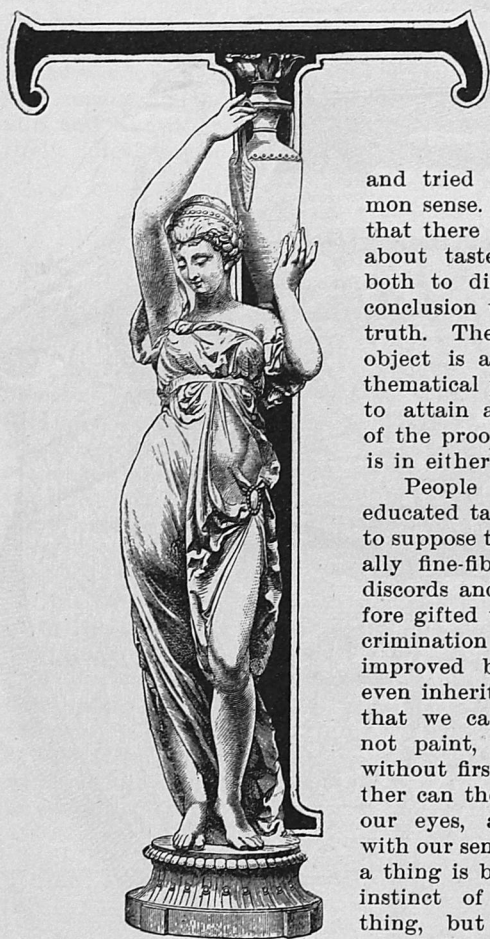
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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

ABOUT WALLS AND WALL PAPERS.

BY MARION FOSTER WASHBURN.



Bronze Candelabra

I. IN GENERAL.

ASTE may be defined as the perception of fitness, which fitness may be reasoned about

and tried by the laws of common sense. It is an old fallacy that there can be "no disputing about tastes," for it is possible both to dispute, and to reach a conclusion which shall embody a truth. The beauty of any given object is as provable as a mathematical problem, but in order to attain a proper appreciation of the proof, a certain education is in either case required.

People are not born with educated tastes. It is a mistake to suppose that one who is naturally fine-fibred and sensitive to discords and harmonies, is therefore gifted with a faculty of discrimination which cannot be improved by training. He may even inherit the strong tendency that we call genius, but he cannot paint, or model, or write, without first being taught. Neither can the brightest of us shut our eyes, and guess correctly, with our sensitive minds, whether a thing is beautiful or not. The instinct of beauty is a great thing, but untrained, is comparatively useless. If, then, education of the observing powers

is of so much importance to even those especially blessed by nature, of how much more importance is it to those who are but common-place!

A thing is beautiful when it is fit for its use and position, and when it is true—without sham. It gains an added worth and becomes an artistic production when it expresses some thought, and so partakes of some human individuality. For this reason hand-made articles are universally considered of more value than the products of factories; they have more of the human element. Even inanimate objects have expression, character, a sort of still life caught from the lives around them, as the stars shine by virtue not of their own light, but by reflection from the sun. A cast-off garment is eloquent of its former wearer, and the stereotyped tables and chairs of houses rented furnished have quite a different expression after each occupation. So when a man decorates his house, would it not be well to think a little about it, that the individuality it reflects may be a pleasant one?

It is obvious from this definition of beauty that expense is not a necessary factor. A work of art, indeed, is expensive, but a house filled full of works of art, may fail of being artistic. Money value and beauty value do not always go together. A cream-colored ground may be needed for embroidery, and it is possible for it to have as great a beauty value in cotton as in silk. A house may be really lovely and yet not have a single costly article within its walls. It is only necessary for each article to harmonize with each other article, and to show thought and culture.

Let us reason together first about walls, and let us see if we cannot make beautiful boundaries to our rooms without extravagance. A wall is a flat, rectangular structure supporting a floor or roof above, and resting upon a solid base. Its treatment must be in keeping with these characteristics. It must retain its appearance of flatness and solidity, and, however bedecked, must still be a wall, obviously fit for its position. It must not obtrude itself too boldly upon the notice, for it is a boundary and a background. Neither can it be left bare, for there is too much of it to be neglected with impunity. It must be in keeping with the rest of the room, so that there shall be harmony of coloring and proportion.

As to proportion, it is generally safe to assume that the room is too narrow, for that room which is broad enough for its height and length is an exception among us. Henry James has called the typical American parlors "corridor-like." Lofty side-walls emphasize this defect, and should therefore be made to look both as receding as possible, and as low.

A white wall answers none of these requirements. It does not recede, but thrusts itself determinedly into notice; it adds to the appearance of height, and is, moreover, cold, bare, uninteresting, and eminently unsympathetic. The effect of a dead white back-ground upon an engraving or photograph is to emphasize the black lines, and to neutralize the soft grayish tints that lend refinement to the picture. In other words, it coarsens every outline. A white cast or statuette loses individuality against it, because there is no contrast. If a square of blue or red velvet be placed behind the marble—an expedient often adopted—then the contrast between the wall and the velvet is so strong as to draw the eye continually to the sharp dividing line, instead of allowing it to rest upon the statue. White is equally unsympathetic to any delicate *objet de vertu* which may be placed against it. If the vase is dark-colored, its outlines are emphasized, and the detail work rendered inconspicuous, while if it is light-colored it is snubbed so that it cannot rightly deliver its message of beauty. This applies to human beings for whom also the wall serves as a background; heavy dark faces are coarsened, pale ones faded into insignificance. The contrast is always too great or too little, and there is never any of the blending of shades which makes harmony. It is a scientific truth that a white surface reflects more light than a colored one, and it is this strong reflection that makes white unbecoming. There are few things not improved by a little politic dimness. Who has not observed the softening power of moonlight and contrasted it with the unmerciful glare of the electric light?

This much about white, because, while it is very well understood that white is condemned by all esthetic rules, many people consider it a prejudice merely and prefer to leave their walls to the last, buying handsome carpets, filling their rooms with expensive furniture, but keeping the walls white for some years. The effect of such houses is always bare and unhome-like, until softening papers are put upon the walls, when the rooms at once become beautiful—perhaps. For it is much more difficult to choose a paper after the rooms are filled with heterogeneous furniture, than at first, when a scale of color may be adopted and adhered to. At best the rooms have been unsatisfactory for a long time, when they might have been beautiful from the beginning.

Next to whiteness, bareness is objectionable. Diversity is preferable to monotony—especially the monotony of calcimine, which is a thin and cold medium. There is no tint that can be made with calcimine which is soft enough and rich enough to satisfy the desire for beauty. The same is true of painted walls—"hard-finished" as they are called. The only advantage that the plain painted wall has over the calcimined is its superior durability; and this, from a beauty standpoint, may be the reverse of an advantage. A man who has had his walls hard-finished at a considerable expense, is not likely to cover them with paper for any mere artistic consideration. He intends "to have his money's worth." A great deal may be done to relieve the bareness of a painted surface by super-adding a broad frieze of paper.

Where an unpatterned surface is desirable, as it sometimes is, as when a small room is crowded with many colors, kinds of furniture, pictures, and bric-à-brac, an excellent result can be obtained by using the ingrain papers. Not the imitation ingrain, which are thin and smooth with little vertical lines at haphazard all over them. These are temptingly cheap, and the dealers will assure you that they look almost as well as the real ingrain; but this is not true; they have none of the depth of tone which makes an ingrain desirable, and they hang badly. Every seam shows, and the whole paper is apt to look spotted, as if it were wet in some places and dry in others. The real ingrain is a soft, thick, unpatterned paper, which comes in all the art tints. The paper is the same on both sides and all the way through, so that the dealers assert that it can be scrubbed with a scrubbing-brush and soap and water. However this may be, it certainly can be cleaned with bread-crumbs. The price of this is fifty cents a roll, and the cost of hanging it is the same as for a gilt paper, as it is so thick that extra care is required in the preparation of the walls. None but experienced men should be allowed to attempt it. The effect is soft and velvety, making an excellent ground for pictures and statuary. It is being much used in art galleries.

With these papers, as with most others of an inconspicuous pattern, a broad frieze is needed, but not a gilt frieze. With an ingrain, gilt would be thoroughly inharmonious, as the appearance of the wall should be soft, and quietly rich, not in the least what is called "handsome." The frieze most suitable for this purpose would be a "one-band" frieze—that is, the full width of the papering taken up by one strip of bordering—with a rather large pattern, full of character, soft in coloring, and conventionalized. Strong contrasts and vivid colorings would be out of place with so quiet a paper.

A NEW design for an umbrella stand in majolica is a bear, life size, standing on its hind feet, and holding a simulated branch between its paws.